



The Post-Standard

Boehlert drills into oil bill, urges CAFE hike

Sunday, July 02, 2006

PETER LYMAN

WASHINGTON NOTEBOOK

His 24-year career in Congress is winding down, but Rep. Sherwood Boehlert has not given up the fight for a policy change that he has been pushing for years increasing federal fuel-economy standards for new vehicles.

Boehlert, R-New Hartford, tried to propose an amendment for increased mileage standards to a bill approved by the House last week that would lift a 25-year ban on offshore drilling for oil and gas. House leaders refused to allow the amendment to come up for a vote.

Boehlert and 39 other Republican members sent a letter to Rules Committee Chairman David Dreier, R-Calif., urging him to allow consideration of the amendment to increase corporate average fuel economy (CAFE) standards from the current 25 miles per gallon to 33 miles per gallon by 2015. Several who signed the letter have not voted for CAFE increase in the past.

Boehlert, who chairs the House Science Committee, has seen support for higher CAFE standards grow steadily. Last year, his proposal attracted 177 votes in the House, with 218 needed for a majority. That was before Hurricane Katrina and the subsequent spike in gasoline prices, and Boehlert says he thinks those events may have tipped the scales in favor of increasing CAFE standards.

"I think it's astonishing that this House would debate opening the entire coast of the United States to oil drilling when we haven't voted on a single significant bill this year to increase conservation," Boehlert said. "If we're going to debate increasing the oil supply, then at the same time we ought to debate reducing demand."

During the floor debate, Boehlert stepped into the well to complain that the bill was being rushed to a vote before members had even had time to read it, though there was no urgent deadline for approval.

"Is this a process we can be proud of?" he asked his colleagues. "It seems all one has to do around here is use the word 'oil' for the sanctity of the democratic process to simply slip away. The process we're using today gives new meaning to the phrase 'oil slick.' "

Boehlert did find a silver lining, however. The measure authorizes two new energy research and education programs, at a combined total of \$37.5 million a year for 10 years.